

The new sexual freedom is something parents often find particularly hard to accept. Many fathers and mothers cannot even bring themselves to think about their maturing children becoming sexually active.

In a harmonious family, the different generations can talk to each other in mutual understanding and tolerance. They may not always agree, but they respect the right of all members of the family to their own ideas, principles and tastes. Children, parents and grandparents are ready to listen with open minds. The closed mind is the greatest barrier to communication — and young people are just as guilty as the older generations.

Family Conference

Some families find that a "family conference" helps to ease the tensions and work out differences. The whole family sits down together and each member has a chance to air his or her grievances and frustrations in an open and "democratic" atmosphere.

Parents should be a *person* to their children, not just a *parent*. Take an interest in the things that interest them. Leisure activities that the whole family can enjoy together are a great help — like camping, boating, hiking, cross-country skiing.

When to seek help

Just as adolescents are frustrated by their parents, they will drive their parents crazy at times. They'll be moody and unpredictable. They may get into scrapes with the authorities. They may experiment with drink, soft drugs and sex. They'll test patience by seeing how far they can go. In almost every case, it's just a normal part of growing up.

How does a parent know if a son's or daughter's behavior is not normal — that they are in fact seriously disturbed? Signs to look for include:

- a sudden drop in marks at school
- a complete change in social activities, losing interest in sports, hobbies, friends
- spending a lot of time alone in his or her room
- a complete and lasting change in mood and behavior
- evidence of severe depression
- destructive or criminal acts that are more than pranks

It's not always easy to tell normal adolescent behavior from a real emotional problem. The guidance people at school, even friends, may be able to give you a more objective opinion. If you come to the conclusion that a serious problem does exist, seek professional help without delay from a local Family Service Agency or from your family doctor.



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Bridging
the
Generation
Gap



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Health

The importance of the harmonious family

Every major source, from the Bible to modern sociological textbooks, tells us that the harmonious family is the basis for the happiness and well-being of every individual, as well as the foundation on which society and social order are built.

Adults are bombarded from all sides with the message that young people today are hostile, alienated, drug-ridden and promiscuous — and generally feel that this reflects in some way their own failure as parents. Some experts say juvenile crime and mental disorders among the young have their roots in broken homes and parental neglect.

Friction is natural

A certain amount of friction between generations is natural and inevitable. It exists not just between parents and adolescent children, but through all living generations in a family. And it's not a new phenomenon. The Generation Gap has yawned wide through the ages. But never in history has the problem been as widespread and worrying as it is today.

Normal stresses in the home can be even more of a problem in non-English speaking immigrant families. A language and cultural barrier creates an even greater obstacle between the generations. As children grow older, and their emotional demands become more complex, the cultural background barrier becomes more frustrating, and they may turn for guidance to other adults (school teachers, for example) whose values may conflict with those of the parents.

Why the gap must be bridged

The confrontations of the 1960s throughout the world clearly show the social dangers. Fortunately, in the western world, things have quietened down on this front (though not necessarily because the gap has measurably closed).

Equally well-publicized have been the effects of rootlessness and permissiveness; the increase in emotional disorders among youth, unwanted pregnancies and VD reaching epidemic proportions, the drug scene.

But doctors increasingly see other serious health implications of the Generation Gap that are not as well known or commonly discussed. Intolerable stresses in family relationships can result in emotional disturbances which in turn lead to a string of physical and mental illnesses that may affect young people, parents or grandparents: anxiety, depression, mental confusion, insomnia, skin problems, gastric and intestinal problems, and more.

What can be done to bridge the gap?

Before the gulf can be closed, parents have to consider a number of facts. Maturing children, who have to contend with a tremendous growth spurt as well as a natural increase in aggressive feelings, often fear that they will lose control of themselves. However much bravado they show in their new-found independence (with shaggy locks, sloppy dress and uncouth speech) . . . however physically mature and bursting with knowledge they appear to be . . . underneath is still the same child who needs firm guidance, protection and security. Parents are giving up their responsibility as parents if they don't provide it . . . if they "cop out."

Adolescents also have a responsibility here. Parents are people, with feelings that can be hurt and beliefs that they feel are important. Adolescents should at least be prepared to listen, and to think about what parents are saying.

Discussion is important

Both generations must be prepared to understand, to discuss, to reason — not to bang the table and lay down the law. It's not easy to accept that many values, perhaps some they hold sacred, don't mean a thing to the other generation. "You can't do it because I couldn't do it" simply won't work. *By all means take a stand on important issues, and hold to it.* But be tolerant in things that the other generation may feel important (like dress and length of hair, or table manners and tidy rooms).